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Censoring the Motion Picture

A MOTION Picture is a motion picture. It is not a "photo-play." It is not a "photodrama." It is not a photo, it is not a play, it is not a drama. It has ceased to be a photo. It has ceased to be a succession of photos. It has ceased to flicker. It has become one moving picture.

A photo need not move to be a good photo. A play need not be acted to be a good play. A drama need not be acted to be a good drama. A motion picture cannot be a motion picture without visual motion.

A photo is a reproduced effect of light on objects. A play is a literary form. A drama is a literary form. A motion picture is a medium of visual motion.

A combination of a photo and a play, or a photo and a drama, does not make a motion picture—or any other unit.

To make a photo play, or a photo drama, of a motion picture is to rob it of its character and make its progress depend upon the progress of the photo, the play or the drama.

To make a motion picture tell a story is an error borrowed from the field of Acting. A story is a good story or a bad story, both before and after it is acted. If it is a good story it does not need to be acted, it performs its own mission through its own literary excellence.

Actors to-day are, for the most part, story tellers. They must "tell the story." Yet there are no new stories. There are no new combinations of old stories. And the supply of new combinations of old combinations of old stories is fast being exhausted. To make acting, or the motion picture, subservient to this condition is not placing either at its highest value.

To the moving picture, and to acting, the story is merely a motive, a convenience or an excuse.

The constitutional function of the Motion Picture is that of visual motion. In this it goes beyond the stage, having greater freedom of space and setting. It is limited to-day, only by the lack of color. Its progress depends upon the freedom of its natural functions.

The motion picture can be *made* to do a lot of things, and to do them successfully, perhaps, but it can do its best only by accomplishing that for which it is constituted—visual motion.

Charlie Chaplin and J. P. McGowan are masters in this field. The motion picture is their natural medium. It developed them and through them it attained to some of its highest qualities. But more of this later.

The point now is that the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry recently met for the purpose of preventing, in every possible way, and with every possible means, the censoring of the motion picture. Yet have not these organizers been censoring it right along? Have they not been limiting its activity to "the story," the "photoplay" and the "photodrama," limiting its scope in the field of visual motion?

They have raised their voices in protest against the censoring of the industry and have over-estimated this side of the question because it is enormous; but there is an industrial side to grand opera as well, though nobody ever speaks of it as an industry.

It is time it were generally recognized that the aim of the motion picture is in the main one with that of the other arts, namely, an æsthetic aim. There is a new form of technique gradually revealing itself which later on will be seized and formulated. There is a world of visual motion yet to be explored, a world the motion picture is opening up to us. Censorship would cripple these efforts.

The question is, should this new and vigorously growing art be hindered.

R. C.